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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HAVANA 000515

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SUBJECT: POLITICAL PRISONERS: A RENEWED GROWTH AREA FOR THE
GOC

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[B.](#) 07 HAVANA 657
[C.](#) 07 HAVANA 22
[D.](#) 06 HAVANA 1379
[E.](#) HAVANA 178

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SUMMARY

[1.](#) (C) The Cuban Commission of Human Rights and National Reconciliation announced on August 10 a three person increase in the number of Cuban political prisoners, from 205 to 208. This represents the first increase since 2005. The CCHRNR highlighted three recent high-profile incarcerations in maximum security prisons, most notably the arrest of dissident doctor Darsi Ferrer. These incarcerations, combined with additional arrests in August, depart from the Government of Cuba's (GOC's) normal reliance on widespread, low level repression and short-term detentions.

POLITICAL PRISONERS ON THE RISE AGAIN

[2.](#) (C) The Cuban Commission of Human Rights and National Reconciliation produced its periodic report on human rights and political prisoners in Cuba on August 10, 2009. Although CCHRNR director Elizardo Sanchez has a troubled past within the Cuban opposition and with USINT, CCHRNR reports are well-researched, reliable, and widely quoted in the foreign press. (Note: No single methodology exists for determining political prisoners in Cuba. Sanchez does list several controversial figures as political prisoners, but they comprise a slight percentage of his total listing. For a detailed explanation of his methodology, see Ref A.)

[3.](#) (SBU) The report notes an increase in Cuban political prisoners during 2009, from 205 to 208. This defies a four year-old downward trend, according to past CCHRNR reports, which cited the following figures:

REPORTING PERIOD	POLITICAL PRISONERS
End of 2004	306
End of 2005	333
End of 2006	283
Mid 2007	246
End of 2007	234
Mid 2008	219

End of 2008	205
Mid 2009	208

(REF A, B, C, D)

¶4. (SBU) Although political prisoners increased by three overall, the report reflects eleven new incarcerations in ¶2009. Eight prisoners were released, either due to parole or sentence completion. (Note: Amnesty International's list of Cuban "Prisoners of Conscience," annexed to the report, decreased from 66 to 65 prisoners due to Mario Enrique Mayo's departure from Cuba. Mayo was released from prison on medical parole in 2005.)

¶5. (SBU) The report highlights three new incarcerations of opposition activists in Havana. Darsi Ferrer, Jose Diaz Silva, and Ernesto Diaz Silva are all being held in maximum security prisons. None has been formally charged by the GOC.

DARSI FERRER

¶6. (SBU) Ferrer is a physician and well respected opposition leader. For the past several years, he has organized periodic, silent marches down the Malecon (Havana's sea wall) which have inspired an increasing following. On July 9, Ferrer was planning an afternoon march along the Malecon. Police arrived at his house in the morning and took Ferrer and his wife into custody for eleven hours. During that time, the police and a neighbor took crow bars to Ferrer's house, ripping his front door and his windows out by the frames while his eight year old son was still inside. When police released Ferrer, he refused to leave the police station, and

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asked that he be arrested. He was removed from the station by force after being beaten by more than eight police officers and nearly strangled. On July 21, state security officials came to Ferrer's house and took him away for a "chat" about illegal construction materials they had found during the "search" of Ferrer's house on July 9. He was taken to Valle Grande maximum security prison, where he has been detained ever since. The GOC has not yet presented formal charges against him.

¶7. (SBU) On August 18, Ferrer disseminated (via his wife) a lengthy, open letter to the ombudswoman of the Ministry of the Interior. He explained his long-running persecution by state security, and detailed the events of his most recent arrest. He clarified why he possessed "illegal goods" before alleging that his arrest was political and noting that a high-ranking military officer in his neighborhood had built a "mansion" without ever being cited by state security. Ferrer closed by noting his aspiration for Cuba to be a "nation (where) justice, equality, and opportunities are a reality that allow all Cubans a dignified life," and then remarked that his particular situation was "just one more case in the midst of a grand ocean of injustices."

¶8. (C) COMMENT: Ferrer's incarceration has sparked unanimous calls for his release by Cuban opposition members, and has attracted attention in diplomatic circles. Contacts in both the dissident and diplomatic communities refer to him as "valiant," "honest," and "legitimate;" one diplomatic contact referred to him as "the thinking man's dissident." Elizardo Sanchez informed us that he is urging Amnesty International to take on Ferrer as a prisoner of conscience. Ferrer's wife met with us on August 14; she has also met with the Hungarian, Swedish, and Spanish embassies, accompanied on her visits by a representative from the EU mission. She is hoping to meet with the Czech, Italian, Canadian, and Indian embassies as well, and has been in contact with the British embassy. Sweden, as current President of the EU, organized a Troika meeting for August 21, 2009 to examine Ferrer's situation. Ferrer's wife and a dissident attorney were invited to make a presentation at the meeting regarding Ferrer's legal strategy. END COMMENT.

¶9. (C) Jose Diaz Silva is an active opposition leader in the municipality of Boyeros, in Havana, and the head of Opositores por una Nueva Republica. He is well known for his ability to organize large numbers of people in Boyeros for events. Ernesto Diaz Silva is his son. Both Jose and Ernesto were beaten by state security on May 25 when fellow dissident Martha Beatriz Roque held a workshop at their home. Multiple opposition members reported on the event, including Martha Beatriz Roque, who published a detailed email with photographs of state security agents, the fight, and the wounds Jose and Ernesto had suffered. Jose Diaz met with us on May 28. He said local police had drawn their guns during the fight and had "pistol whipped" Ernesto; Jose believed he would have been killed if state security agents hadn't intervened and told the local police to holster their weapons. He also said that he had never before experienced the level of repression he and his family were then facing.

¶10. (C) Two weeks later both men were arrested. Jose Diaz has been held in Valle Grande maximum prison since he was detained on June 10, 2009. He has not been formally charged, but was detained for "inciting violence." Elizardo Sanchez believes Jose Diaz may be charged or released soon, since the sentence for inciting violence is only one to three months, and the GOC cannot legally detain someone for a longer period of time than the maximum sentence for their crime. Jose's son Ernesto Diaz was detained on June 9, 2009 and has been incarcerated at Combinado del Este, a notorious, maximum security prison in Havana. He has been threatened with three to eight years for attempting to injure a police officer, but has not yet been formally charged. Elizardo Sanchez, Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leyva, and Martha Beatriz Roque all believe the Diaz Silvas were arrested because of events on May 25.

AND THE LIST KEEPS GOING

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¶11. (C) Two additional noteworthy incarcerations occurred in August, after the July 31 closing date for the CCHRRR report.

¶12. (SBU) ERNESTO MEDERO AROZARENA is an opposition member with close ties to Antunez (aka Juan Luis Garcia Perez). Medero was on his way from Havana to Villa Clara on August 3 to join Antunez in celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of the Maleconazo. Medero, a member of the opposition organization "Presidio Politico Pedro Luis Boitel" and a former political prisoner, was detained at the bus terminal in Havana, where he allegedly resisted arrest. He is being held in Aguica maximum security prison in Matanzas and, although he has been threatened with "desacato" (resistance), he has not been formally charged.

¶13. (SBU) JUAN CARLOS GONZALES MARCOS, better known as YouTube sensation "PANFILO," was arrested on August 4 and has already been sentenced to two years for "peligrosidad" (dangerousness). He is incarcerated at Valle Grande maximum security prison. Panfilo rose to prominence when he drunkenly lurched into a filmed interview with a Cuban musician and interrupted it to scream (more or less), "Food! Food! What we need in Cuba is food! There's tremendous hunger here! Film me! I don't care! Film me! Put me on! What we need is FOOD!" The short video was posted on YouTube and quickly spread, with more than 400,000 viewings. It was broadcast on Miami television stations, sampled in reggaeton and rap remixes, played at a Willy Chirino concert, and converted into a wildly popular cell phone ringtone.

¶14. (SBU) Two more Panfilo YouTube videos have surfaced since. In the first, Panfilo appears to be sober, and explains that he was drunk when the first video was taken,

and that he doesn't want to have any problems with anyone because of politics. He mentions that State Security has visited his house and emphasizes that no one paid him a cent for the video. In the third video, shot in Vedado by the Malecon, Panfilo is blazingly drunk once more, and speaks openly of his fear that he will be taken to Villa Marista and "disappeared." He asks viewers to care for his family, and dances for a while in the middle of the street. In a recent post, blogger Yoani Sanchez stated that no video has circulated through "alternative information networks" as quickly as Panfilo's since student Eliecer Avila challenged Ricardo Alarcon during a discussion. Panfilo's arrest has received coverage off-island in international press and is widely reported on the internet, not only on YouTube but also in chat rooms and on numerous blogs.

THE PRICE OF TAKING IT TO THE STREETS

¶15. (C) COMMENT: The only "dissident" who has been formally sentenced is Panfilo, the hapless, likeable, essentially apolitical YouTube star. Interestingly, the GOC chose to sentence him with Cuba's most reviled crime, "dangerousness." The government could have silenced Panfilo by institutionalizing him for alcoholism in a sanitarium or hospital, but instead opted to sentence him within days of his arrest. The four "traditional" dissidents who have been incarcerated have yet to be charged, but it would not be surprising to see the GOC frame these dissidents as common criminals, guilty of possessing illegal goods or attacking policemen. (Note: By failing to provide a formal charge, the GOC also prevents the dissidents from crafting any effective legal defense strategy. End Note.)

¶16. (C) COMMENT (continued): According to our contacts, state security will currently tolerate events within a home, but will clamp down on civil society leaders who take their activities "to the street." The four dissident incarcerations above all center around well-publicized events, either on the Malecon, in Boyeros, or in Placetas with Antunez. Since Raul Castro took charge, dissidents have noted that state security tends towards subtle but effective repressive techniques such as short-term detentions, threats, surveillance, and harassment (Ref E). Long-term incarcerations, particularly of well-known dissidents like Darsi Ferrer, have been unusual. If they continue, it would signify a decided shift in GOC strategy towards the opposition.
FARRAR